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SUBJECT: NIGERIA: POLITICAL MURDERS OR MURDERED POLITICIANS?

REF: LAGOS 545 AND PREVIOUS

1. (U) The spate of high profile attacks and killings of prominent Nigerian politicians and public figures has again caused many to question the strength, and even the future, of democratic governance in Nigeria. In the last three weeks, at least ten prominent Nigerians have been brutally attacked. Several have died in the attacks, while a few managed to escape. The boisterous and raucous Nigerian press is full of speculation that the killings and attacks are somehow politically motivated. One of the papers reported that there had been 32 "political killings" since 1999. Another printed a list of fifty-five supposedly politically connected murders and attacks in the 1999-2004 period - including a couple beheaded by an angry "lover" and incidents involving "students" stabbed in fights. Less than half of the list has any connection to politics or politicians. Nevertheless, the number of attacks recently cannot be ignored although the jury is still out on what this all means.

Dikibo murder

2. (U) The first weekend in March, all the newspapers carried front-page pictures of the body of Chief Aminasoari Dikibo lying in a pool of blood on the back seat of his car. According to witnesses, Dikibo, a National Vice Chairman (South-south region) of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), was being driven to Abuja for a meeting when his car was ambushed and he was killed with a single bullet to the head. President Olusegun Obasanjo quickly (too quickly, according to some) labeled the incident an attempted robbery, and the police rounded up the usual five suspects. In only one instance in the growing number of high profile murders in the last five years, the case of the murder of Attorney General Bola Ige, has anyone been charged or brought to trial. In the last two years, the victims in southern Nigeria include not only Ige, but also Rivers State opposition politician Marshall Harry and PDP leader Andrew Ogun. On the gubernatorial front, Lagos State Governor Bola Tinubu's convoy was attacked in Anambra State; the Benue State governor's convoy was attacked a few days earlier. Currently, Abia State Governor Orji Kalu is accusing a top PDP operative of threatening to kill him. Last week saw an attack on Lagos' Third Mainland Bridge against the Chief of Naval Staff's convoy and three luxury buses were struck on the same bridge a few days later.

Attack on Tinubu's convoy

3. (U) According to news reports, on March 6, gunmen attacked Tinubu's armed, twelve-car convoy on its way back to Lagos from Anambra State. Witnesses (and even the Governor himself) initially told the press that the attack was an attempted robbery. Governor Tinubu was not in any of the vehicles when the attack occurred, but one policeman attached to Tinubu's entourage was seriously wounded. There are unconfirmed reports that several attackers were killed.

4. (U) There are conflicting views on whether the attack was, in fact, politically motivated. Some pundits allege that the attack could be the handiwork of such prominent personalities as Chief Chris Uba, a major actor in the crisis that followed the botched kidnapping of Anambra State Governor, Dr. Chris Ngige. Uba is said to be deeply angered by Tinubu's support for his political rival, Ngige, and could have seen Tinubu's unexpected presence in Anambra as an opportunity to teach the insubordinate governor a lesson by example.

5. (U) Another suspect is everyone's favorite bad boy and candidate for villain, former Military President, Ibrahim Babangida (IBB). IBB is rumored to be very uncomfortable with Tinubu's growing popularity in the southwest and is said to be having difficulty accepting Tinubu's emergence as the most popular Yoruba politician. IBB's presidential ambitions are no secret, and he has been working since the last elections to win

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the south for himself in 2007.

6. (U) Whether any of these theories proves true or not, it is clear that any successful attempt on Governor Tinubu's life would have had serious consequences for Nigeria. Members of Tinubu's Cabinet and the Lagos State Police Commissioner told CG that there would almost certainly have been spontaneous attacks by the Yorubas in Lagos and other parts of the southwest against perceived Igbo and Hausa enemies. Such attacks could have attracted retaliatory killings of Yoruba in other parts of

Nigeria. Gangs of unemployed and restless youths would have joined in the fray to release pent up frustrations, and the criminal element would have certainly taken advantage of the breakdown in civil order.

17. (SBU) Sources close to the Governor have told CG that the attack on Tinubu was much more serious and organized than has been reported, while the Deputy Governor's Special Assistant told PolSpec that the attack happened exactly as reported in the papers. Despite our inquiries, so far no one has answered the good investigator's question: "Who would benefit if Tinubu were suddenly removed?" Although his death could cause civil disorder and ethnic clashes for a period, there is not one "suspect" who clearly wants to step into the vacuum such an event would leave.

18. (SBU) Comment: In addition to the violence against Governor Tinubu and other prominent Nigerians, the southern states have recently seen an upswing of crime against ordinary people, both Nigerian and foreign, residents as well as diplomats (reftel). To date, there is no discernible line connecting the dots to a particular culprit or condition that explains these events - be they political or criminal. Nor can we tell whether this spate of violence constitutes a spike or a trend. The killings and other criminal activities cut across all racial, ethnic, geographic, economic and political groups. Post continues to monitor the situation closely and will report further developments.

HINSON-JONES